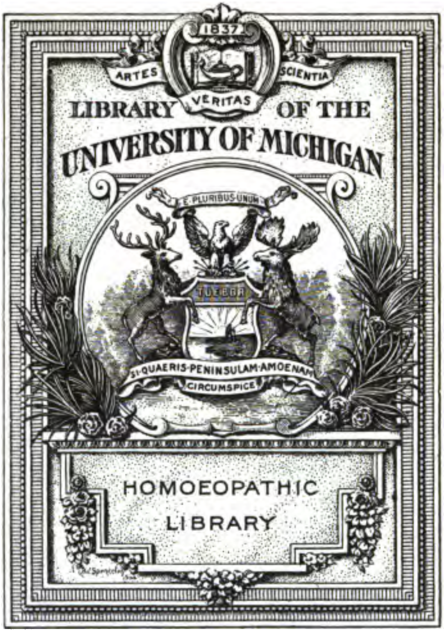

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MEDICAL UNION NUMBER SIX

By William Harvey King
Author of
My Smoking Room Companion

Medical Union Number Six

FROM the deck of a steamer off Fire Island Light, homeward bound, on the morning of the twenty-fifth of October, 1940, I viewed my native land for the first time in more than thirty years. My long absence in foreign parts had been the result of one of those aberrations apt to come to a man who is not over-well balanced and has the inborn spirit of adventure and romance.

In the early part of the twentieth century I was a rising young physician, fairly well established in conservative New York, and with every prospect of a useful and successful career. Suddenly a latent spirit of unrest took possession of me, and, heedless of consequences, I plunged into a life that made me an alien to my country for more than a quarter of a century. Abandoning my profession and disposing of all my property, I left San Francisco on a voyage of dis-

covery. Far in the Southern Pacific I sailed on a small craft I had chartered, buoyant with the hope of finding hidden treasures, that being the prime motive of my undertaking. Caught in a typhoon, so common to that region, my little schooner was driven upon an island inhabited only by a strange race of wild people.

The sole survivor of the wreck, for thirty years I remained with these aborigines, living in their native way, and shut off from all communication with the rest of the world. But the time came when, after I had long given up hope of ever seeing home again, I was rescued by a ship which had been blown from its course, and was carried to Hongkong. From there I proceeded eastward through the Suez Canal, and finally took passage on the steamer that was now bringing me back to New York.

An hour after passing Fire Island Light the pilot boat hove in sight, and the pilot boarded our ship, bringing with him the ever-welcome newspapers. The half-dozen books I had taken with me on my journey thirty years before, had served me well, as they not only helped

me to while away much time in reading them over again and again, but they also enabled me to retain my knowledge of the English language. To my surprise, however, when I succeeded in getting one of the pilot's newspapers, I found in it many words I did not understand. My own vocabulary was not only much restricted, as the result of non-use, but the English dictionary seemed to have expanded. Still further was I disappointed in being unable to find a single name that I could recall as at all familiar. In this uninteresting state of affairs I soon fell to idly glancing through the paper, reading here and there a headline. Suddenly my eye caught sight of the word medical in the large type of a heading. Being thus attracted I read the following article:

"Medical Union Number Six.

A Notice to the Public.

"Owing to the great prevalence of typhoid fever and diphtheria in the city, and the consequent abundance of employment for physicians, charges for medical services at residences during the hours

from 8 A. M. to 8 P. M. will be increased from $10, present rate, to $15 per call, and from 8 P. M. to 8 A. M. from $20, present rate, to $30 per call. Furthermore, it has come to the knowledge of the undersigned, that many families, in attempts to economize, are dispensing with the use of the physician, prescribing remedies and performing cures in their own way. Before any so discovered can thereafter on any occasion have the attendance of a physician they will be obliged to pay the regular fee which would have accrued to the Union's attendant, and will in addition be fined $100. It may be well to remark in this connection, by way of a reminder, that chemists selling any remedy whatsoever to persons without a doctor's prescription, are breaking the rules of this organization, and will be boycotted forthwith.

(Signed)
"MICHAEL O'BRIEN,
"SOLOMON UNTENHEIMER,
"Riding Delegates,
"Medical Union Number Six."

For a moment I was mystified. I could scarcely believe I had read cor-

rectly. I went over the article again. Sure enough, there it was in the New York Chronicle, and apparently its meaning was clear. As I finished the second reading I took note of the names of the riding delegates, Michael O'Brien and Solomon Untenheimer. They, at least, had an unmistakable sound; they were undoubtedly good old New York names. Especially had they been familiar to me in the past in connection with official positions. Labor unions were flourishing when I left the country, but is it possible, I thought, that now the medical profession has been thus organized? Turning to a fellow voyager who had been but a few weeks from the country, and pointing to the paragraph, I asked him what it meant.

"Mean?" said he. "It seems to me its meaning is clear."

"But really," I asked, "is there such a thing as a medical union?"

He looked at me in surprise. "Where have you been?" he asked. "The entire medical profession has been unionized for the past twenty years."

"And do the people submit to this?" I inquired.

"Submit?" repeated my companion, "What else is there for them to do? As for that, why has not the medical profession as good a right to form a union as any other class of men? They were about the last to withstand the great popular wave that swept this country some years ago. The clergymen were the only ones to hold out longer; they organized two years later."

"What!" I exclaimed. "The clergymen too have a union?"

"See here, my friend," said he, "what have you been doing? Outsleeping Rip Van Winkle?"

"No," I replied, "I have not been asleep all this time, but have been on a desert island."

"Evidently you have been far outside the pale of civilization," returned my companion.

"Evidently I have," said I.

"I can understand," said he, "that a man who has been away from the civilized centers of the world for so many years, will be surprised at the advances made during the first half of the twentieth century. While the Medical Union and the Clergyman's Union, which form

a part of the advanced civilization of this period, are looked upon as a matter of course by the present generation, there are some older people who will sigh and tell you how much better things used to be when they were young; when one could choose the doctor he liked best, a man he could learn to love and respect. But in this generation the people have become accustomed to the Medical Union, which sends the doctors to them and relieves them of all responsibility, and I think they like it. In the old way we were obliged to look about for a good doctor ourselves. It was more or less of a bother. Now you simply send to the office, say where you are sick, and the doctor comes; you have no choice in the matter. It is more convenient, and the American people think a great deal of their convenience."

I had not thought much of what I should do to earn a livelihood when I reached my native land, but this article, and the conversation concerning it, brought the subject to my mind. I well knew I should have to study hard a long time to properly fit myself again to practice medicine, but that I might not be

allowed to practice at all had never occurred to me. The proposition now appeared quite different. Would I be admitted to the union, or, if not, would I be allowed to practice as a non-union doctor? That troubled me much.

After so many years of enforced idleness I was naturally anxious to get to work at once, and accordingly, the day after I landed I began looking about for something to do. The fact that I possessed very little cash undoubtedly had much to do with my desire to find work immediately, just as it discouraged me from attempting to enter upon my profession for the present. As I was walking through Forty-second Street, the principal business thoroughfare of the city, my eyes fell on a neat sign which bore the inscription, "Central Office of Riding Delegates, Medical Union Number Six." Without pausing to consider, upon the impulse of the moment, I walked in, and asked to see one of the riding delegates. I was at once shown into Dr. Michael O'Brien's office.

Dr. O'Brien greeted me with chilling reserve. He was a short, thick-set man with broad shoulders, above which was

perched a very large head; the neck being short gave the head the appearance of having been driven downward upon its support. His brow projected, making his eyes deep set, a characteristic that was accentuated by the shading of the heavy eyelashes. His forehead was full and high, and his face, as well as his body, gave abundant evidence of strength.

"Well," said he, taking a cursory survey of me, "what can I do for you?"

"I am a doctor," I replied, "out of practice for a time, but am willing to work, and work hard, to fit myself for duty, if you will give me a chance."

"The first thing I should advise you to do," said he, "is to get a suit of clothes that will fit you; and then have your whiskers trimmed and hair cut. Excuse me, sir, but I should take you for the wild man of Borneo, rather than a doctor."

"The accuracy of your observation does you credit," I replied. "For thirty years I was a wild man on an unknown island in that part of the world in which Borneo is located."

"Really," said Dr. O'Brien, with a

look of wonderment. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Although I gave quite a complete account of myself, the tale did not take long to tell. So stupid had my life been, in my own mind, at least, that certain things which might have been of great interest to others seemed so trivial to me that I did not think them worth mentioning. Dr. O'Brien listened with manifest interest to my story, and when I had finished, he said:

"And after all this amazing experience you are anxious to settle down to the humdrum life of a physician?"

"It does not matter," I replied, "whether I am anxious to settle down to a humdrum life or not. I must earn a living."

"Precisely," said the doctor. "I suppose you are about penniless."

"Your supposition hits the mark very nearly," I replied.

"That being the case," said he, "we had better try and place you at once. There is a vacancy in Chapter Seventeen, which is located in the Harlem district, for a night visiting man on the chest. You can, therefore, go to work at your earliest convenience."

"But I first need to do some studying," I replied. "While I have not forgotten all I learned a third of a century ago, I am not prepared again to practice without thoroughly refreshing myself on what I did know, and learning of the advances which have been made since I left the profession for adventure."

"Your fitness for practice matters not so much," said Dr. O'Brien. "An hour's coaching in the back room will prepare you for that, so far as medical knowledge is concerned. Of far greater importance is it for you to properly school yourself in the principles of the union. That you understand yourself thoroughly as a union man, and that you make no mistake in strictly following out the rules, is a very important matter. Let me ask you; will you unreservedly agree to obey all the rules of the union, and abide by the decisions of the riding delegates?"

"If I am taken into the union," said I, "I shall feel in duty bound to obey its rules, and, furthermore, beggars cannot be choosers. However, having no knowledge of your union, I should like to know something of its rules and workings before I unreservedly give assent."

"You shall know," said Dr. O'Brien. "Unions became a necessity for the preservation of the masses as against the classes. Their growth has been a natural one, beginning first with the artisan class. Having been carefully fostered under the protection of wise legislation, they have now become the dominant force of this Republic. As regards the Medical Union, we have a very complete organization which comprises the entire country."

"Having been away, separated from the world, so long," said I, "the idea of a medical union seems strange to me."

"There was great opposition at first," said Dr. O'Brien. "People did not realize that doctors had the same right to form combinations, unions or trusts, which ever you wish to call them, as had people in other pursuits. While the majority have come to accept that principle now, there are still some who would do away with our union, but you will generally find the ones most strongly opposed to us are those who are prominent members of some other union or trust. The American people are very patient; you can foist anything upon them if you only go about it in the right way."

"Do you not have trouble in controlling all the doctors, and keeping them in the union?" I asked.

"Not at all," replied Dr. O'Brien. "You see we control the output of doctors. We allow only enough licensed to practice to fill the places we have."

"But suppose one should break away from the union, and set up on his own account?" I asked.

"That situation could be handled in many ways," said Dr. O'Brien. "For instance, no person who had once employed a non-union doctor could ever have a union man treat him until he had paid into the treasury of this union the sums that would have been paid as fees for attendance had a union man been called, plus $100 fine. In the next place, no clergyman would officiate at the funeral where a non-union doctor had been in attendance, so one would have to be pretty sure not to die under a non-union man if he wanted a Christian burial. There has always been a great bond of sympathy between clergymen and physicians, and this now finds expression in a very practical way by sympathetic strikes. While these and

various other expedients might be resorted to, the easiest way would be to kill the non-union doctor."

"What," I exclaimed, "commit murder?"

"Oh, no, not that bad," said the riding delegate. "The killing of a scab is no longer a crime in this country, we have become so thoroughly unionized."

"And the legislature does not interfere," I asked, "by passing laws restricting your powers?"

"The legislature?" said Dr. O'Brien, with a look of disgust. "Really, I should think you had been out of the country for fifty years instead of thirty. Legislators and executives have always been most kindly disposed toward unions, but now it is a very simple problem, so far as legislation is concerned. The legislators are all union men. We would not allow them to be elected if they were not. But supposing one should become recalcitrant after he has been seated. Would we argue with him? Not at all. We would issue an order that not a man, woman or child in his district should receive medical attendance until he saw things in the right light. There would

probably be a scourge in some part of his district, and if perchance there were not, we could easily produce one by sending a case of smallpox among his constituents. That legislator's life would not be worth much if he failed to turn his sentiments inside out, and quick, too. But now, as to your special duties. You are to take diseases of the chest. Remember that means the chest only. Above, your territory goes to the lower border of the larynx, or if you do not happen to know just where that is, say the collar-bone. Below, it goes to the diaphragm, or if the location of that organ is a little obscure in your mind, just remember to the end of the breast-bone. This includes both front and back, but be careful you do not go either above or below those boundaries."

"The larynx is often involved in chest diseases," said I.

"Certainly," replied Dr. O'Brien. "In that case the throat man goes also. You see formerly, before the days of unions, one doctor attended both the throat and chest, and received no extra pay either. Now the patient has to pay for two doctors. It also happens occasionally that

a cough upsets the stomach. In that event the stomach doctor visits the case with you, all three getting fees at the same time. The advantages of unionism are very apparent, are they not?'

"Very apparent indeed," said I. "But have you no hospitals?"

"Plenty of them," replied the doctor, "but no more free hospitals, and no more free dispensaries. We own them all. If people can't pay, and the tax-payers won't pay for them, why they must die."

"Do you not think it would be better for me to go into a hospital," I inquired, "where I could better fit myself for the work? After graduating I spent a year in a hospital gaining knowledge and perfecting myself in technic."

"In those days," said Dr. O'Brien, "it was necessary for a physician to acquire as much knowledge as possible. People had a right to choose whatever doctor they wished, and they always chose the man best prepared, or the man they thought was the best, but that day is past; now we say whom they shall have. Why, man, that is the very foundation principle of unionism. A good man could always have plenty to do. The

function of a union is to make people or employers take the poor man with the good, and pay him the same price, too. The day for invidious comparisons by the public in selecting the good doctor, and leaving the poor ones without employment, or on reduced pay, is past in this country, thanks to the unions. You are to be located in Chapter Seventeen, the office of which is in One Hundred and Twentieth Street. Your district is bounded north by One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, east by Fifth Avenue, south by One Hundred and Fifteenth Street and west by Seventh Avenue. You are six hours on duty and eighteen hours off."

"If I should be in a critical case when the time for leaving came around," I said, "I suppose I could stay and see it through. My conscience would scarcely allow me to leave a patient under such circumstances."

"My dear fellow," said Dr. O'Brien, "if one thing more than another is a handicap to progress, it is that conscience you talk about, but, thank Heaven, it is getting to be a scarce article in this country. We are six-

hour men, and six-hour men only. You stop work sharp when your time is up, no matter what may be the situation or what may happen. Do not forget that, and also remember the other points I have given you. Breaking a rule once means a fine of one hundred dollars, the second time five hundred, and the third time expulsion from the union. If that should happen you had better go in the country and break stone for a living."

The office at One Hundred and Twentieth Street was different from anything I had ever seen before. It was divided into two departments, one for the office doctors, and one for the visiting doctors. Necessarily the office doctors required more room than the visiting doctors, and each had an office to himself opening upon a larger central reception room. There was the doctor for the head, the throat and neck doctor, the chest doctor, the stomach doctor, the liver doctor, the doctor for the extremities, and the brain and spinal cord doctor. There was also another important doctor. It was possible that a complication might arise through some man presenting himself with a disease difficult to

classify properly, and as a doctor could prescribe only within his limits, some one might have to do without treatment. So far as the patient was concerned this would not have worried the riding delegates over much, but there was the fee to be considered. Therefore, to avoid the danger of a doctor's overstepping his limits, or of a fee being lost, an extra doctor was placed on the list, and assigned to an office off the reception room. He was classified as the jim-jams and delirium tremens doctor, and to him all doubtful cases were sent.

Visiting doctors were classified under the same general headings as the office doctors, with the addition of several surgeons; surgeon of the head and neck, surgeon of chest and abdomen, surgeon of extremities, and an anæsthetist. The rooms were very commodious and comfortably furnished, but as they were only for lounging purposes, where a man could lie off and take it easy when he was not making calls, they did not have at all the appearance of a doctor's office.

Word that I was on my way to the office of Chapter Seventeen had preceded me, and upon my arrival I was at once

asked to step upstairs to the private office of Dr. Tobias, riding delegate in charge of the chapter, who occupied an elegant apartment superb in all its appointments. As I entered he saluted me, and bade me take a seat.

"Ah," said he, as he glanced at the letter of introduction, "Dr. Schneider, or rather the wild man from Borneo. I have had a conversation over the 'phone with Dr. O'Brien about you; and he is chuckling yet over his hit on that."

"It quite surprised me," said I.

"Dr. O'Brien," continued the riding delegate, "has informed me that he has given you a pretty clear outline of the workings of our union, but I want to ask you a few questions." Wheeling his chair around so as to face me and looking sternly into my eyes, he asked: "Who am I?"

"I take you to be Dr. Tobias, the riding delegate of Chapter Seventeen of Medical Union Number Six," I replied.

"Exactly," said Dr. Tobias. "But what is a riding delegate?"

"I suppose he is one who has general supervision over the chapter to which he is delegated," said I.

"General supervision, general supervision," repeated Dr. Tobias, in a tone of voice, and with a manner that plainly showed how much my answer had displeased him. "Am I only the general supervisor of Chapter Seventeen? Is that your idea of a riding delegate? I would have you know that I own Chapter Seventeen. From my mouth comes both the law and gospel of Chapter Seventeen. In fact, I am Chapter Seventeen. If I say to you, Dr. Schneider, the moon is made of green cheese, you are to say, 'Yes, Dr. Tobias, the moon is made of green cheese.' Now, do you understand what a riding delegate is?"

"I am certain I do," I replied.

"That sounds more like it," said Dr. Tobias. "You will now sign the oath of allegiance to the union. This was formerly done at the central office, but now we have it signed at the office of the chapter where a man is assigned. One is more apt to keep its precepts in mind if he knows the document is where it can be picked up and read to him if circumstances require." He drew from a drawer of his desk a piece of paper par-

tially covered with printed matter, to the end of which was attached a blank form for an oath to be taken before a magistrate or notary. "Now I will read this oath to you," he went on, "and when I raise my voice and pronounce the words with emphasis, you just tremble for fear you may break that part of it, for while the document is short there are portions of it that mean much. Listen. This is it.

"'I, the undersigned, on becoming a member of the Union of Confederate Doctors of the United States, and attached to Medical Union, Number Six, do hereby solemnly avow that I foreswear all other authority and allegiance I have ever given assent to that shall in any way conflict with the rules and teachings of this union; that I shall hereafter, and do now place THIS UNION SUPERIOR to all allegiance TO MY COUNTRY, TO MY GOD, AND TO MY FAMILY; that I will be GOVERNED BY ALL ITS RULES, and ABIDE BY ALL DECISIONS OF THE RIDING DELEGATES, and that I will pay all dues and assessments from that which I have, EVEN THOUGH THOSE WHO ARE DEPENDENT UPON ME MAY BE IN WANT.'"

I listened to the reading of this document with some surprise. However, I had no compunction in signing it, as I had been among the savages too long to acknowledge allegiance to any country or any God. I took note that the paper did not ask the signer to go hungry, only the family, and as I was not encumbered with a family, I had no objection on that score. Therefore, without comment, I took up the pen and signed, and subscribed to the oath which followed.

"Do you know," said Dr. Tobias, "I like your way of doing business; no questions, but simply sign. Such men make a good, strong union. While some may squirm and talk about the prick of conscience, and allegiance to their Maker, and their country, they all have to sign just the same, but we never feel so confident of them, for that prick of conscience is apt to make itself felt once in a while. I am sure you and I will get on famously. For the present you are to take Tour Four. The hours are from 12 midnight to 6 A. M., on diseases of the chest. I believe Dr. O'Brien gave you all the information required on that subject."

"I think I understand my duties so far as the union is concerned," I replied, "but I fear I am lamentably weak as to my medical knowledge."

"Were you not coached at the central office before coming up here?" asked the riding delegate.

"Yes," said I, "but a man who has been out of the world for thirty years cannot absorb everything in an hour."

"That matters not so much," said Dr. Tobias. "If you do not know what is the matter, or what remedy should be given, administer a dose of morphine, enough to keep the patient quiet until you go off duty. You make the call and get the fee, that is the important part. Do not become too ambitious to cure your patients. Let the man who follows you have an opportunity to collect his fee. If you cure patients too quickly, you will make yourself very unpopular with your brothers in the union."

With these instructions I was dismissed until my hour for duty arrived. Returning to the office about eleven o'clock, I sought out the man whom I was to relieve, and endeavored to learn

from him what cases I might be called to, and also the treatment he was prescribing, that I might continue it to the best of my ability. The doctor apologized for not leaving some work for me. He said he had not been informed that the vacancy in Tour Four had been filled. Consequently he had left word with all the patients that they would be unable to get a doctor until after six in the morning, as there would be no doctor on duty for chest diseases until that hour. He admitted that there were several who should be seen, but the union would not permit him to work overtime. Neither would it permit other doctors to see them, so he could do no more.

Having, therefore, nothing to do, I lounged about the office, getting acquainted with my associates. I was questioned much by my colleagues, as they had all heard more or less of my adventures. I was not averse to talking of my travels, but I was more anxious just at this time to learn my duties. I looked to find a medical book or medical journal from which I could glean some information, but I only found novels. When I expressed surprise at this my new friends laughed at me.

"Why, man," one of them said, "there has not been a medical journal published in this city for ten years. As for medical books, a few are published for students, but they are never read by doctors, or perhaps it would be correct to say seldom read, for occasionally you find an ambitious man anxious to excel. But what is the use? It is all time thrown away, for the people are obliged to have you just the same. It is not skill or knowledge that gets you a living, and life is too short to do a lot of work, just for the satisfaction of being skillful."

About 4:30 in the morning the telephone rang. A man had been run over, and the person sending the messenger said the patient was suffering great pain in the side of his chest.

"A call for chest medical and chest surgical," said the clerk.

Thankful indeed was I that my first call should be of such a nature as to necessitate the presence of another physician, for I did not really know how to take a case, let alone doctor it. On our arrival we found more than the telephone message had led us to expect. The man had been run over, as stated, and he also

had a severe pain in the side of the chest which was evidently due to a broken rib, the broken end sticking into the pleura. Of far more threatening consequence, however, was a crushed leg which was beyond the power of surgery to save and required amputation at once. The chest surgeon, of course, could not do this. As considerable blood was oozing from the mangled limb, I suggested that we tighten the bandage which some one had put around the groin to stop the hemorrhage.

"No, no," said the chest surgeon, "we will telephone for the extremity surgeon. We have no right to touch that part."

"But that may be necessary to save the man's life," I suggested.

"Perhaps," said the chest surgeon, "but if tightening the bandage is the only thing that will save his life, so much the worse for the man, as we cannot do it. Every new man who comes into the union, especially if he be an old practitioner, gets into trouble by interfering with things that do not belong to him. I will set the broken rib, you prescribe an opiate, and by that time the extremity surgeon will be here ready to amputate the limb."

It was five o'clock before the extremity surgeon was ready to begin work. Just as the patient was being put under the anæsthetic the surgeon glanced at his watch.

"I will not have time to finish the amputation and dress the wound," said he, "so telephone to the office and ask the extremity surgeon of Tour One to come here."

"Cannot a surgeon finish an operation he has begun?" I asked the chest surgeon. "It seems to me he should not leave when he has once started in with it, even though his time limit is passed. I should think it might be dangerous to turn over a partly finished operation to another."

"I see you have much to learn about our union," said my companion. "To work overtime is breaking an important rule. A surgeon operating near the time limit should be careful not to have a hemorrhage, or any other dangerous complication, on his hands as the clock strikes, but if he should, why it's unfortunate for the patient. I do not see that you carry a watch," looking at me. "You should have one, and a good one,

too, for having the wrong time is no excuse, and will not save you from the wrath of the riding delegate."

"No," said I, "I have no watch. I shall buy one the very first money I get, as I need it to count the pulse with."

"It doesn't matter much if you do not count the pulse," said my companion, "but you must have a watch so as to make sure that you do not overrun the time limit. I have an extra one, and will loan it to you for a few days until you get on your feet."

It did not take me long to learn the rules of the union and to become imbued with its principles as well. At first I feared lest my lack of knowledge of its workings or my sympathy might get me into trouble, but after the Strong case which came along about four weeks after I had entered upon my duties in Chapter Seventeen, and, later, a little experience I had with the riding delegate, I acquired confidence in myself, and had a feeling of security in my position.

The Strong affair tried me severely. It was a case of bronchitis, the patient being a bright little boy of some ten years, the only child of well-to-do par-

ents. He did not show signs of improvement under treatment. On the fourth day the inflammation worked upwards, and when I made a visit just before my time to go off duty, I found the household in a great state of excitement. The mother met me at the door.

"Oh, doctor," she exclaimed, "why have you been so long coming? I telephoned for you more than an hour ago."

I informed Mrs. Strong that I had been away from the office for some time and had consequently not received her message, and that I had simply called on my way back, as I had intended doing when I last saw the child.

"Come quick to the room," she exclaimed. "I fear Georgie is dying."

Even by this time I had learned that it was not a union principle to hurry, so, therefore, I took it rather leisurely. Before I entered the room, however, I discovered that I could be of no assistance, as the sound of the hoarse,harsh cough which emanated from it, plainly told me that my little patient was suffering from an attack of croup, a disease distinctly located in the larynx, and, therefore, entirely out of my region of treatment.

"Oh, doctor, hurry, please," cried the mother. "It does not seem that Georgie can get his breath five minutes longer."

"Madam, I am very sorry," said I, "but you should know that I cannot treat a case of croup. That is not a chest disease, but is located in the larynx. You must send for the throat doctor."

"But, doctor," she exclaimed, "you will not stand by and see my child die? Have you no medicine you can give him?"

"Yes, madam," I replied, "I have medicine in plenty, but to treat the case is strictly against the rules of the union. You must try and get the throat doctor."

"Oh, doctor," she cried, dropping on her knees before me, "you wouldn't be so cruel as to let my Georgie die without trying to save him, would you?"

"I am very sorry, as I told you," said I, "but I can do nothing."

Putting her hands pleadingly toward me, she cried out, "For God's sake, doctor, do something to save my boy. Have you children? Do you know what it is to have a dear little fellow nestle up to you in love and confidence? Do you

know what it is to have the sweet kiss of pure love from a child you have given life to? Did you ever have a child suffering or frightened give you an appealing look for relief and for protection? Did you ever feel your paternal heart-strings torn by the agony and suffering of one dearer to you than life itself? Look at my boy, my darling Georgie, as he is suffering, struggling for life. Doesn't the sight pierce your heart? Doesn't it bring up to you what might happen in your family, and doesn't it stir the humanity within you enough to move you to take the consequences, to try and save him?"

It was not a pleasant situation. I realized I was in danger, and that my first great trial as a union man was at hand. Should I be loyal to the union, and consequently loyal to my own interests, or should I follow the dictates of conscience, the greatest of all sins against a union? The struggle was only momentary. I thought of my oath. I thought of my present prosperous condition. I had a vision of going into the country and cracking stone, as Dr.

O'Brien had put it. I was a union man, and must be inflexible.

Mrs. Strong was still on her knees with her hands stretched out nearly to my face, with a pleading look on her countenance, waiting for an answer. It made me shiver every time I looked toward her, and so, to avoid temptation, I kept my eyes turned away. However, I was aware that she knew a struggle was going on within me, and I actually felt the fervor of her prayers for the softening of my heart to that degree that I would disobey the union's orders and prescribe for her boy. I realized that I must do something to shatter her hopes, and break the power she was trying to exert over me. So I remarked in as cold and matter-of-fact manner as I could:

"Madam, I am not a family man."

As I said this I glanced at her. The shock nearly prostrated her. But she quickly recovered, and, with still more pleading in her voice, cried:

"But you must have had a mother, even though you have had no children. Do you not remember nestling in that mother's arms? Do you not remember

the many sweet caresses she gave you? Can you not recall how you clung to her when you were sick? And can you not now see her loving face as she bent over you, sympathized with you and caressed you? Oh, man, turn your head Heavenward, and see if you cannot behold her angel face looking down upon you to-night, and in that look urging you to soften your heart, to do your duty to your fellow creature. See if there is not a pleading in her countenance, the pleading of a mother, 'My son, be a man.'"

Union principles were in danger of giving way in my mind. Iron-bound rules were losing their grip on me. Involuntarily I put my hands to my head as if to support my reason. My frame shook under the strain that was upon me. The mother's trembling hands came nearer to me, and her pleading looks pierced me like daggers. A saving, desperate thought came to me.

"I will get permission from the riding delegate," said I, and that I might escape that look as soon as possible I rushed downstairs to the telephone and called up the office. The clerk answered.

"There is a child here dying of croup,"

I said. "Can the throat man come at once?"

"The throat man is here," replied the clerk, "but it is now fifteen minutes of six, his leaving time, and it would be after that hour before he could get to the case, so he could not prescribe if he was there. I will send the throat man of Tour One as soon as he comes in."

"But," said I, "the child will die before that time. Will not the riding delegate give me permission to prescribe for the patient?"

"The riding delegate is not in," replied the clerk, "and he certainly would not give you permission if he were. See here, Schneider," he continued, "you are in danger. Like all new men who haven't become thoroughly imbued with the principles of the union, you let your kindness of heart outweigh your own interests and all our interests. You say the child will die. That is probably true, and you are very much excited about it. But that is no business of yours. Think of our union and what it means to you. I give you this advice as I know you are a new man, and I understand your danger. After you have been in the union

a few months more, such things will not bother you."

"But it seems cruel," said I, "to let that child die with the agonized mother pleading for help."

"What is one child," said the clerk, "compared to the principles of our union? Why, man, just think for a moment of the thousands and thousands of children who have died of starvation in agonized mothers' arms for the principles of unionism in this country. I say to you again, be strong, and think of the consequences to yourself. Just recall Dr. Butterworth and his fate. It will help you in your resolution."

I put up the telephone receiver and slowly retraced my steps. I recalled Dr. Butterworth, and the thought of his fate caused chills to run up my back. He was a stomach doctor. His first offense was for prescribing for a patient suffering from a severe pain in the right hypogastric region. It was a case that plainly belonged to the liver doctor. According to the rules of the union Dr. Butterworth was fined one hundred dollars. His next offense was for extracting from the larynx a thimble, that a child had at-

tempted to swallow and that was strangling the little one to death, a case that surely belonged to the throat doctor. He was promptly fined five hundred dollars. The third offense was for doing the identical thing I was just now in danger of doing, prescribing for a child dying of croup. Thereupon he was expelled from the union. Being a man of an independent, unyielding character, he continued to treat the child whose life he had saved, when on the second day he was found dead on the very block where he had committed such crimes against the union. As no clergyman would officiate at his funeral, and no undertaker would take charge of the remains, and no grave digger would dig a grave for him, his body was dumped into the potter's field with the paupers and criminals.

"Oh, no," I said to myself, as I entered the room again. "I will not be caught in any such trap. I will be strong, as the clerk has advised me to be. Conscience and kind-heartedness were good things to have when I first began practice. They were good for business then, but now they have no place in a union."

"If your child should live thirty minutes longer," I said to Mrs. Strong, "the throat doctor of Tour One will be here to see him."

"There is no hope for my darling boy, then," she cried, throwing herself sobbing across the bed on which the dying child lay.

I looked at the little fellow for a moment. "You are right," I said; "he will not last ten minutes longer."

Leaving the mother with her darling treasure, as she was calling him, I thanked Heaven I had proved so resolute, and looked forward with complacent satisfaction to the pleasure of being complimented by the riding delegate. Nevertheless, this occurrence had its effect on me. At this time I was not so thoroughly absorbed in the union that I could throw off the feeling of a certain amount of responsibility to my fellow men. Of course, now I see my mistake, and recognize that my responsibility to the union and its principles is first, to myself second, and to my fellow men last. The lesson that taught me this came soon after the affair just described. It

was a severe experience, but I do not now regret it.

I had thought much about the little fellow I had seen dying of croup, and also of some changes which I considered would be an improvement on the present rulings of the union. These changes I had not worked out in detail thoroughly enough to present to the authorities who could take action on them, but I had given them enough consideration to lead me to suggest an idea or two to my colleagues one night as we sat around smoking while waiting for calls. I noticed as I began to talk that my associates looked queerly first at me, and then at one another. Nevertheless, I proceeded to unfold some of my ideas, pointing out just how I believed the union could be improved, as for instance by leaving many things to the discretion of the doctor on hand, until the doctor to which the case rightly belonged could get there. The strange looks of those near me changed to fright, and as I continued still further and ventured to suggest that the union was altogether too hide-bound, every one, to a man, sprang to his feet and rushed out of the room.

I was dumfounded. I looked first in one direction, and then in another, in the expectation that I might see them all gathered in some other part of the room. Finally I turned toward the clerk. The look upon his face startled me. It gave me the impression that something dreadful had happened.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"What is the matter?" said he. "Poor fellow, we have all liked you, and have done everything to help you along, but there is now no hope for you as I can see. It would have been better for you to have remained on your desert island." As he said this he shook his head and walked to the other end of the room as far away from me as possible.

"But what have I done?" I asked. "And why did all the doctors rush from the room with frightened looks as if the very devil was after them?"

"You have been guilty of a terrible crime, and you will find out all about it in good time," replied the clerk. "Now you are suspended from duty, and you must go upstairs and wait for the riding delegate."

"Dr. Tobias," said I, "does not get

here until ten o'clock. That will be hours yet, and I would prefer to wait here. You say I am suspended. Who will take my place if a call comes in?"

"No one will take your place," replied the clerk. "If some one gets sick in the chest before six o'clock, he will have to wait. You must go upstairs at once, so that your former companions may return and enjoy the comforts of the room from which you have driven them. They are waiting outside and will continue to wait until you vacate. You are now an outcast and they would be disciplined if they had anything to do with you."

I walked upstairs where I had hours to wait for the riding delegate. The more I thought the more perplexed I became. What had brought about all this change in my position? I tried to recall all I had set forth, and just how I had put it, but as my ideas were very confused on the subject I had talked about, not having been well formulated in my own mind as yet, I could not at all remember my exact utterances. More than that, I could not understand why such great objection should be taken to the views I had expressed.

When Dr. Tobias entered his office I saw by the wrinkled brow, firm set jaw and flashing eyes, that he was in an angry mood, and I instinctively felt that I was probably the cause of his displeasure. On that point he did not leave me long in doubt. Taking his seat, he eyed me sharply for a moment.

"Dr. Schneider," said he sternly, "sit down." At the same time he emphasized his words by hitting the desk before him with the end of his fore-finger. "I do not know as you are so much to blame as we are, or rather, as Dr. O'Brien is, for taking such a man into the union. I protested at the time. I told him that you had been away from America too long; that you had not grown up with union sentiment, like those who had been continuously in the country. But he was determined to have you, and I was beginning to think his judgment was right, after all. Now comes this blunder, this crime."

"It appears from what I have heard and seen," said I, "that I have been guilty of some offense. Will you be so kind as to let me know what that offense may be?"

"Offense, offense?" repeated Dr. Tobias, angrily. "You are not guilty of an offense. You are guilty of a crime Of a crime; do you understand?"

"No, I do not," said I. "Of what crime have I been guilty?"

"You have not only been guilty of a crime, but you have been guilty of the greatest crime that can be committed against a union. You have dared to hold opinions of your own, have dared to think for yourself. That is a crime. Worse than that, you have given utterance to those opinions in the presence of union men. That is the greatest crime!"

"Does belonging to a union necessarily debar a man from having opinions of his own?" I asked.

"Debar him from having opinions of his own?" exclaimed Dr. Tobias, who was now so agitated that he jumped up from his chair and began pacing the floor. "Why, man, are you a fool? Of course it does. That's the very rock on which the union stands. How long would unions continue to exist if members were allowed to have opinions of their own, and give utterance to them? Where would unions be in two years'

time if members were allowed to think for themselves? When a man thinks for himself he begins to develop individuality, and individuality is the one thing that unions cannot afford to tolerate. The only opinions that are allowed in unions are the opinions of the riding delegates. That makes unions secure. Because people thought for themselves, the first unions in this country failed, or had great difficulty in maintaining themselves. Years ago the average American was very prone to think for himself. He prided himself on being a free American, but he has long since banished such false notions from his head, and is now willing to let the riding delegates do all his thinking for him."

I saw at once the reasonableness of Dr. Tobias' remarks, and told him so in such a straightforward way that he was clearly impressed with my sincerity. His anger disappeared, and he again took his seat.

"The penalty for the crime of thinking for yourself," he said, "is expulsion from the union, and for thinking for yourself and giving utterance to the thoughts in the presence of other union men is ex-

pulsion first, and—well, the culprit is likely to be found dead on the third block from the office."

Chills ran up my back for the second time as I now recognized the enormity of my crime.

"But," continued Dr. Tobias, "I see you are sincere in your union principles and you are still ignorant. The latter is greatly in your favor, for it is the best qualification a good union man can have. You stood the test well for a new man in that case of croup, and I believe you have in you the making of a thorough union man, so I will modify the sentence and fine you one thousand dollars. You will retain only just enough of your earnings to pay for your lodgings, and buy yourself two meals a day until the thousand dollars is paid."

"Then I am to go on duty again?" said I.

"Certainly," said he. "How otherwise would you be able to pay the fine?"

"To whom does the thousand dollars go?" I asked.

Dr. Tobias' eyes flashed, but only for a moment. "Well, you are ignorant of unions, and it is evident we must still

make allowance for you," said he, condescendingly. "The fine goes to the riding delegates, of course."

"Very well," said I, "I will live on one meal a day until you have the thousand dollars."

"That sounds like it," said Dr. Tobias, more cheerfully. "That's the way I like to hear a union man talk. I believe you will come out right, after all."

We do not always realize the silent, persistent force there is in the advancement of civilization as it creeps upon us from day to day. It is our environment which, unseen by us, shapes our course. When I first saw the notice in the New York Chronicle signed by Dr. O'Brien and Dr. Untenheimer, riding delegates, I was shocked at the idea of a medical union. Next, I was surprised at the lack of interest shown by the doctors in the science of their profession, and again by the restrictions placed upon them by the rules governing their actions. No sooner had my ideas, or, in other words, the way I looked at things, become adjusted to the new order than suddenly there came upon me this trouble with Dr. Tobias for thinking on my own account. It was

just here that I made the greatest discovery of all, that I had begun at the wrong end of the process of development, or rather learned last the very thing that I should have learned first.

The whole of this advanced civilization has for its foundation the one idea Dr. Tobias expressed to me, that individuality is a thing not to be tolerated. Had I learned this lesson first, I would have had no trouble. Dr. Tobias summed up all my difficulties when he said that he had protested to Dr. O'Brien against taking me into the union, because I had been out of the country too long, and had not been educated up to the union idea. When I left the country individuality was a thing to be proud of, and people took profound satisfaction in having ideas. While I was away this had all changed and I was simply unfortunate in not having had the privilege of cultivating the higher civilization along with the people of the most advanced country in the world. However, I had one thing to be thankful for, and that was that I had such a considerate riding delegate as Dr. Tobias. Nevertheless fortunate as I was in this respect, I cer-

tainly felt it was most unfortunate that when I had learned my lesson well, and, having paid to the riding delegate the thousand dollars, was feeling secure in my position and reaping the fruits of my work, the people should take it into their heads that medical unions were not conducive to the best interests of the country.

I was lounging about the office one day, when a doctor who had just come in said to me:

"Schneider, you must have been born under a lucky star."

"I have never been impressed with that notion," said I. "On the contrary, I have every reason to believe that I was born under a very unlucky star."

"Unlucky?" said my associate. "You are the luckiest fellow I ever knew. You come to the city a comparative stranger, and get a splendid position the first day. You offend the riding delegate to the degree that you should lose your head, and you are only fined a thousand dollars and allowed to go on. You refuse to break the rules of the union by prescribing for a case of croup and let the patient die, no more than any one of us

would have done, and you get a national reputation."

"I am aware that I was very fortunate to get a position so quickly," said I, "and I am very thankful that I have so kind and considerate a riding delegate as Dr. Tobias. As for the national reputation you speak of I am at a loss to understand what you mean."

"Read this article," said he, shoving an early edition of the morning paper toward me. "Just think what those headlines are worth to you."

I took the paper and read in great flaming headlines:

"DOWN WITH THE UNIONS."

"Another Incident of the Abuse of Power by the Riding Delegates."

"Dr. Schneider Willfully and Maliciously Lets a Child Die of Croup Rather Than Break a Silly Rule of the Medical Union."

The article that followed first severely criticised our union for having rules restricting the freedom of the doctors. It then attacked me for not having man-

hood enough to break the union rules and prescribe for the Strong child. It even declared that I was a pig-headed, ignorant and willful ass, and not a fit person to be a doctor.

"If that is what you call getting a national reputation," said I, "I would be glad to dispense with it."

"What," said my colleague, "you are not pleased with that article? Why, man, I would give my whole year's income for such an attack on me. It will be the making of you. Nothing will promote a man so fast in this union as to be attacked by the public. No matter how big a fool or rascal he may be, let the public denounce him enough to warrant a cry of persecution, and his future is assured. That attack is bound to make you a riding delegate, and who knows, it may make you governor."

Mrs. Strong, with a supposed grievance, because I refused to prescribe for her child, and let it die in order that the principles of our union should be maintained, started the whole affair. That pleading woman, who was on her knees before me, became a tremendous force. She organized a Mothers' Protective and

Anti-Union Society. The members of the Society finally won a few independent newspapers over to their way of thinking. Independent newspapers are a nuisance. If there is a great upheaval in the country, a disturbance of the serenity of the public, a turning out of a lot of officials just when they have got nicely fixed in position, and are becoming rich through the office, ninety-nine times in a hundred it is the work of independent newspapers. Such things ought not to be allowed in a civilized country like this. A riding delegate should be placed over every newspaper office to do the thinking for the editors.

Of course, we union men smiled at the credulity of the people who were fighting us in the belief that they would be able to destroy our organization. We simply cut off from our visiting lists the members of the Mothers' Protective and Anti-Union Society and the editors of the independent newspapers, and went on as usual.

Still, we were very much surprised to discover that this action on our part had no effect in forcing the Society to disband, and the independent newspapers

to change their views. Despite the boycott the membership of the Society increased with alarming rapidity, and the independent newspapers became more violent in their attacks upon us. However, we did not worry, as we still had many expedients to fall back upon. Presently, an order was promulgated throughout the entire United States to discontinue vaccination. Smallpox became epidemic in many places. This, we thought, would bring the people in line, but instead it acted like oil on a bonfire. There was a greater increase than ever before in public sentiment against us.

The independent newspapers renewed the attack on me. They gave my history; they called me bad names; they said I did not know the difference between a case of delirium tremens and the Aurora Borealis. Every attack they made was another round on my ladder of fame. The union men all knew, as my associate had intimated they would, that if the newspapers attacked me, I was of the right sort to be a leader.

Dr. O'Brien sent for me.

"Schneider," said he, as I entered his office, "I congratulate you. I knew there

was the right kind of stuff in you. I think, on general principles, it would have been better to wait a little before electing you a riding delegate, but the clamor became so strong that we could not resist it."

"Am I a riding delegate?" I asked.

"That is why I congratulated you," said he. "It was a sure thing after the last attack upon you. Any man who could get up such a disturbance as you have, is certainly worthy of promotion in a union."

The next step taken by the riding delegates was to order a general strike, every physician to lay aside his medicine case and every surgeon his scalpel. Dr. O'Brien said to me:

"Schneider, we will have about two weeks' vacation. Then the people will come to us on their very knees, and beg for the strike to be declared off."

Imagine our surprise when sentiment against the union became stronger than ever. The public ignored us altogether. They said they would have none of us, even though they all died. The situation certainly did look critical, when, after three months of the strike, sta-

tistics showed that the death rate in the country was only fifty per cent. of what it had been for three months immediately previous. The time had come when something decisive must be done. The union must be maintained at any cost. A meeting of the riding delegates from all parts of the country was called. Our sessions were held behind closed doors. On the third day of the meeting a general secret order went out for every bacteriological laboratory in the country to be put in commission. The order directed that the entire capacity of these laboratories should be devoted to the culture of the germs of the bubonic plague. On the fourth day another general secret order was sent to all the chapters to collect the rats in the neighborhood, and send them to the bacteriological laboratories.

The issue now was clearly drawn. It was the life of the people, the life of a nation, against the life of a union. The people had settled down to the belief that the strike was virtually over, that we had been whipped, and that the riding delegates were only waiting for some plausible excuse to declare the strike off. The

independent newspapers who gave themselves the credit for having done such a good work for humanity, as they put it, had in nearly every issue humorous articles on our riding delegates. We said nothing. We had ceased to talk to the people. We were receiving daily cipher dispatches from all the bacteriological laboratories in the country, and were ready to act. Finally, the preparations were completed, and secretly from the laboratories in all parts of the United States, on the evening of the eighth of June, 1942, two million rats, bearing in their veins the germs of the bubonic plague, were set free.

Ah, you willful people, who think for yourselves! You would-be union smashers! You self-selected critics of our riding delegates, see what you have brought upon yourselves! Will you longer flout the statistics of fifty per cent. decrease in the death rate in our faces?

At first the nature of the disease was not suspected, but the mortality was so great that it soon became apparent to everyone that a severe plague had broken out all over the country. In less than a month whole families were no more, vil-

lages and cities were swept off the map, entire counties were depopulated, and powerful States became mere fragments of their former greatness. The medical profession possessed the only serum that would cure the plague. Home remedies or simple methods as opposed to radical methods ignorantly used, as some of the independent newspapers were wont to put it, when commenting on the reduced death rate of fifty per cent., did not work here.

At last the people came to their senses. They asked the privilege of meeting the riding delegates. Inasmuch as they had a special grievance against me, it was thought fitting that I should preside at the conference. It would make their humiliation a little greater to receive commands from me. The committee of the citizens came before us, and they were most submissive. Their speaker started in with a harangue in the form of an argument.

"Stop," said I, putting up my hand in a meaning way. "This is no time for argument. You should know that unions are not to be argued with. Arbitration is no longer an article in our By-Laws.

If you really want the strike declared off, the first thing to be done by you is to make an abject, humble apology to us for having presumed to question the wisdom of unions. If that apology is satisfactory to us, we will dictate terms."

The speaker hesitated for a moment, and conferred with his associates, and then, giving way, started in with the apology.

"Stop," said I again. "Every member of the committee must signify his acquiescence in this apology."

There was a brief hesitation, but in less than thirty seconds every one joined in supplication to us. The speaker evidently had not expected to be called upon for an apology, and had not prepared himself, as he gave only a sort of rambling talk, in which "we apologize," and "we are very sorry," occurred often. After a little prompting by Dr. O'Brien, which he took most meekly, assenting to everything the riding delegate set forth, the apology was finally concluded in a satisfactory manner. Then I, as chairman, propounded two questions:

"First, do you admit that this union is a great blessing to humanity?"